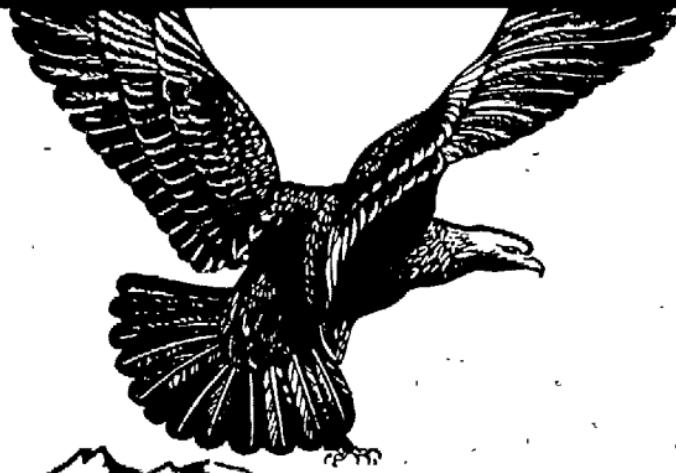


ON TRAIL WITH THE REDSKINS

James Evans of Canada



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ON TRAIL WITH THE REDSKINS

(JAMES EVANS, FRIEND OF THE FUR-TRAPPERS)

By
MARY ENTWISTLE

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"True stories of real people"

JAMES EVANS

1801-1846

ON TRAIL WITH THE REDSKINS

Sailor and Apprentice

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD JAMES stood facing his father, with face flushed and heart fast beating. It was terribly daring a hundred and thirty years ago for a boy to cross his father's will. James did not quite know what would happen, but he was determined, and said so. Captain Evans, master of a sailing vessel plying the Baltic trades, frowned heavily on his insubordinate son. "So you *won't* go to school, and you *must* go to sea, my lad?"

James nodded. "Yes, sir!" he answered a little breathlessly, and waited for the skies to fall.

Captain Evans tugged at his beard and eyed him sternly, but from under the frowning eyebrows his far-sighted seaman's eyes twinkled. He admired pluck and determination even when, as now, it defied his will. "Very well, my lad," he said at last, "if you must go, you must. You'll sign on as cabin-boy next voyage. Cut along now." Dismissing the delighted James with a curt nod, he turned to his wife. "Don't you fret, Mother. I'll see he comes to no harm. It's the only way to knock the seagoing business out of him. Living rough in a good north-easter or two will cure him. I'm determined no son of mine shall follow the sea. Sailing will soon be crowded out by steam, and it's a hard life anyway."

So young James got his wish, and half delirious with

excitement went off to sea. What his father hoped would happen did happen. Seafaring was not all that James's lively fancy had pictured it to be, and after two voyages he had had enough. There was little fun and a deal of hard work for a cabin-boy in a sailing vessel. He lived on seamen's fare—hard tack and salt meat ; he had to obey at the run the curt, rough orders barked at him ; no favour was shown him as the captain's son ; he fetched and carried and lived hard like any other young sea apprentice. Through two voyages he worked, enduring the bitter cold and buffeting of wild, stormy weather, with pluck and cheerfulness. He astonished his father and delighted the men. "Born sailor, he be," they said. Perhaps Captain Evans felt a twinge of regret that his plan had worked so well when James announced that he "didn't want to be a sailor any more" and that he was quite ready to go to school.

James had no regrets, however. He had had his way and tired of it, so now he turned his cheerful mind to the next thing. He shouldered his school satchel as happily as he had shouldered his small sailor's kit. His cure from his attack of 'sea-fever' was lasting and complete, for never again did he crave to be a sailor. Life held plenty of thrills, even for a schoolboy, for James lived in stirring times. Napoleon was still the big noise, marching his armies through the half of Europe and threatening the peace of the other half. The scare of invasion had only just died away on our coasts and the great war general was still the bogey used for threatening naughty children. James heard breath-taking stories from American settlers in which the Redskin always figured, sometimes as the friend of the white man, sometimes as his most bitter, revengeful foe. Then pioneer missionaries returning from the wilds of Africa and

the far-off South Seas had stirring adventures to tell of struggle and strife in great forests and lovely islands among savage peoples.

These stories of warfare and discovery in the distant places of the earth were enough to fire anyone's imagination. A dozen times a month James must have made and remade his mind on what he should be when he became a man: tinker, tailor, soldier, but never sailor! His father settled the matter, as fathers did in those days, for as soon as tall James had finished at school Captain Evans had him apprenticed to a grocer in the town. It certainly looked as though adventure had ended for James; he was cast for a quiet life with nothing more exciting in prospect than adding up accounts and weighing out pounds of currants and candles. Larking with the other apprentices and taking a part in the town sports satisfied his high spirits and love of fun, so James settled down to grocery and games happily enough. And then adventure called him once again. Before he was through his apprenticeship he heard the call to follow the Hero of heroes, Jesus Christ, and answering, discovered that he had bound himself to the greatest master and adventurer of all.

James knew that he must show somehow, some way, that he had enlisted in the service of Jesus Christ. Perhaps he dreamed of doing great deeds; facing terrible odds on a coral shore, among savage islanders; or trekking through trackless forests in darkest Africa. But nothing more hazardous came his way to try his pluck and test his loyalty than teaching in Sunday School, and then tramping miles away to tiny villages to take part in the evening services.

Serving and following his Hero added to James's high spirits and love of fun. It gave him zest in work

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and play, but although larking was just as good fun as ever, playing about in his master's time, James decided, couldn't be done, for now he had a higher standard of honesty and loyalty.

In the Backwoods

The long years of apprenticeship ended at last and James went off to a post in London. His father had retired from the sea and was now in Canada. James liked the bustle and gaiety of city life, so when letters came bringing news of the strange new life in Quebec, he felt no desire to share it. But the letters grew more urgent, for the Captain loved to have his family around him, so after two years of London, James gave in and booked his passage to Canada.

But what was he to do there? When the excitement of joining the family again and exploring a little of the country was over, James looked round for a job. He knew the grocery trade inside out, but in the eighteen-twenties there were no big stores in Quebec or its neighbourhood, such as he had worked in. Little old-fashioned 'general' shops, serving everything from molasses to mice-traps, and buttons to buffalo hides, gave him no scope. No one wanted as an assistant a young man with up-to-date knowledge of how a large British grocery establishment should be run.

"Young man, it's not a store-keeper we want, but a schoolmaster," the white settlers told him. "There's not a soul to give our youngsters a bit of schooling. Will you take on the job?"

With pride they showed him the schoolhouse they had built of roughly hewn cedar logs and furnished with benches of split green wood straight from the forest. It was little better than a barn, as rough looking and unfinished as James feared that his

teaching might be. Chuckling to think how well the new teacher matched the new schoolhouse, James began his schoolmastering career.

The sturdy settlers' boys and girls were amazed at their teacher's ignorance of forest lore. So while James taught them to read and write and do simple arithmetic, they taught him how to become a good backwoodsman, able to provide for himself with gun and fishing-rod, to build a shack for shelter, and to paddle the lightly balanced Indian canoes.

It was a good life, James thought, good enough for a woman to share. Fortunately the woman he married thought so too. She loved the keen, blunt-speaking settlers' boys and girls, and saw at once how easily the rough schoolhouse at the edge of the clearing could be made comfortable. School and schoolmaster thrived!

At that time Canada was still a new and sparsely occupied country, without railways or many good roads. Distances between town and village, solitary homesteads and small settlements, were often very great. Churches and chapels lay far apart, so ministers were travelling preachers in those days. They would stay a few nights in a friendly home, hold services in the host's barn and then go off to another distant settlement. The travelling preachers liked to stay at the schoolhouse near Quebec, for they were sure of a welcome from Mr and Mrs Evans, and a good, dry schoolroom in which to hold the services.

The preachers liked to wander into the schoolroom during school hours. One preacher as he listened and watched was filled with longing. He unburdened his mind to James. "You are just the man the Ojibway Indian boys and girls need," he said. "You know we have a mission at Rice Lake, Ontario? They are good folk the Indian Christians, but very ignorant,

and they know it. 'Teach our boys and girls,' they say to us. 'Red Indian ways are bad ways. Help our sons and daughters to grow up true followers of Jesus Christ.'

Those words were a challenge to James. There had been many months in which he had almost forgotten that he had given himself to the service of Christ. But now he knew that his Master was bidding him follow once again. He looked around at his good schoolhouse, his garden; he thought of his quick, lively young scholars. He was interested in the boys and girls he knew, much more than in young Red Indians whom he had never seen. But dare he pretend that he hadn't been challenged? James talked the matter over with his wife.

"We're doing good work here. Can we leave it for a very doubtful sort of job in an Indian encampment? It would be a terribly hard life for you, and for little Eugenia."

"Yes," Mrs Evans agreed, "it will be a hard life, but it's a call, isn't it? And roughing it won't hurt our small daughter."

"Red Indians calling, God calling too," thought James. "*I must go.*"

At Rice Lake camp there was nothing at all but wigwams; not a building of any kind, nor even a tree felled. Mrs Evans began housekeeping in a tent, while James with a few willing helpers set about building a log cabin and a schoolroom. The forest echoed to the sound of axe and the crash of falling trees, and to the noise of hammer and saw. While James taught these grown-up, grave-faced Red Indian men the art of house-building, he was learning from them their speech. When the day was done and the men could no longer see to work, James wrestled with

translation. "I can teach them to read a little in English," he wrote to a friend, "but they must be able to read the Bible in their own Ojibway language."

It meant a time of serious overwork, but James could not rest until the schoolroom was up and he could speak and think easily in the Ojibway tongue. When the building was ready he coaxed the half-shy, half-sullen, wild boys and girls to come to school, and because they accepted him already as a friend, they came. Twelve months later James wrote gaily to a friend that he had now fifty scholars. "Twenty-five are reading an English reader and the New Testament. We have commenced reading the translation of seven chapters of St Matthew's Gospel in the native tongue. Fourteen scholars are studying arithmetic." The James Evans Academy for the sons and daughters of the Ojibway Indians was well established, though it was soon to see a change in headmasters. Others were to carry on Evans's teaching work, while he gave all his time and energy as a travelling preacher to the Ojibway Indians.

The Southward Drift

At York Factory, the Hudson Bay post of the Hudson Bay Company, just about this time, the outlook was stormy. Spring had come; the air was filled with the sound of running water, the chirp of nesting-birds, and the honking of wild-geese flying in wedge-shaped clouds to their breeding grounds beside the great lakes. It was the time of year when the trappers from the north-west plains brought their loads of furs to the trading posts. Last year had proved a bad season, and as the days went by toward summer, bringing with them only half the usual number of trappers and loads, it was plain that even a worse season had befallen the Company.

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"Something serious must be the matter," said the governor to the chief factor. "Norway House on Lake Winnipeg reports the same decrease. Has there been an epidemic among the hills? Is there news of a great sickness?"

The factor had seen many years in the service of the Company, but he too had never known so poor a season. He was frankly puzzled. "I asked a few questions of yon Injuns in the camp beyond the stockade," he answered. "The poor bodies know nothing at all. 'Tis no sickness, sir, that keeps the trappers from coming."

"Then *what* is it?" snapped the governor. "You look as if you had heard something. Come, out with it. There's no sign of any disturbance nor hint of an Indian rising."

"That's no' the reason," agreed the factor. "The Injuns are friendly disposed, but I did hear one queer thing forbye. I doot if there's onything in it. That yon half-breed scout of ours brought in a tale. The trappers are drifting southwards, he says, taking their furs with them. That means they're trading with southern dealers. A few went last year, Scout says, families an' a'. Seemingly many more have gone south this season."

"Drifting southwards!" the governor exclaimed. "But why! tell me that? No trading company treats its trappers more honourably than the Hudson Bay Company. What can be the reason for this southward drift?"

No answer forthcoming, the Company's boat sailed to England with its scanty cargo; with it went a lengthy report from the governor. Months later, for the sailing vessels were slow, came an answering document from London, the gist of which was: "Find the reason for the Redskins' drift and stop it!"

The men of the H.B.C. trading posts got busy, and before another spring came round the mystery was solved. The solution, however, seemed as puzzling as the mystery, so thought the governor as he listened to the scout's report.

"Sir, the Redskins are moving southwards in large numbers. They travel to the lands of the south wind in search of the white men's Book."

"A book?" echoed the governor. "What do they want with a book? Very few Redskins can read. I wish they did want a little education, then they wouldn't tipple so much."

The scout shrugged his shoulders. "This is what I have heard," he insisted. "Some hunters from southern Indian tribes journeyed to the north-west. They were made welcome in the wigwams of their northern brothers. Around the camp-fire the hunters spoke of Gitchi Manito, the Great Spirit, saying that He is the Father of white men and red men alike. They told of a Book which the white men read, this Book speaks of the goodness and kindness of the Great Spirit. The northern men listened, they cried, 'We would hear more of the Great Spirit who loves men. Does this Book live in your country, the land of the south wind?' When the hunters said, 'It lives there, my brothers, in the wigwams of the white men'; the others cried, 'We will journey to the south lands and see and hear for ourselves.' That, sir, is why so many of the trappers have left northern hunting-grounds."

"But this is most extraordinary, fantastic!" protested the governor.

"Aye, sir, but it's the truth seemingly." The factor added his comment: "It's no' so strange when you think on it. The red men's religion is so full of nightmare fears and cruel beliefs, it's no wonder that

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they should crave for something better when they hear about it. They're on the move, without any doot, looking for the Book and for a white man who can read it them."

The factor spoke his mind, knowing that it was safe to voice his opinions on the matter. In the past the governor had been opposed to the education of the Redskins, but experience had taught him that contact with religious, God-fearing white men, had a good effect on the wildest of red men. The governor was actually a subscriber to a missionary society working among the tribes. He sat cogitating over the scout's report, until remembering that the London headquarters waited for his reply, he squared his shoulders to the task of writing the strange news.

However surprising it proved to be, the dignified directors of the Company treated it with respect. Some of them cared and thought very little about religion ; others were genuinely glad that the Indian trappers and boatmen were seeking knowledge of the God Whom white men worshipped. But all were agreed that their chief concern was the welfare of the Company and anything which could be done to increase its trade and power must be done. Its great source of wealth was the year's ship-load of valuable furs, and these only the fur-trappers could procure. At all costs the trappers must be helped to look on the Hudson Bay Company as their friend. The Company must show itself ready to help the red men to get what they wanted—the knowledge of God. Let the trappers understand that the Book for which they sought could be found in the Hudson Bay Company's territory, the fur-bearing regions over which control had been granted to the Company, then the drift from the Company's trading posts would stop. "We must seek advice from the Wesleyan Missionary

Society," declared the directors. "That Society has missionaries already at work among the Red Indian tribes. They will find us the right man."

The right man! Like St Paul, the apostle to the Red Indians of the North-West Territory would be "in dangers oft"; he must suffer disappointments and never despair; must endure hardship cheerfully; travel farther than St Paul on journeys as hazardous. He must forget himself and his needs in the needs of the trappers; must know and love them. For only one who was their friend could make plain the love of God to them.

There were many good men, strong and faithful, already working among the tribes in Canada; but with one mind and voice the officers of the Missionary Society agreed that they had found the right man in the Reverend James Evans.

North-West Calling!

James had now been a Methodist minister for some years. He was seldom in his manse at Ottawa, for his work lay among the Red Indian tribes who wandered to and from hunting-ground and fishing-ground on the north shore of Lake Superior. Wandering in their company, James discovered their privations and hardships and shared them. Shiftless they were, gorging when there was plenty, never providing for the day of scarcity, yet how could James keep his store of salt meat and flour for himself? Like the rest he went hungry when the stores were gone and when line and gun failed to bring in food. His home was a tent pitched beside their wigwams, and as he wandered with the red men through the vast wilderness, untouched by man, fishing and hunting became part of everyday life; so did doctoring and visiting in the wigwams. Preaching and teaching was saved

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for the day's end and for every Sunday. No wonder that he arrived back to his home and family after a long preaching tour as lean, bronzed and hardy as any Red Indian !

On one homecoming he found the letter telling him of the H.B.C. request for a man to work among the North-West trappers, and calling him to the post. There was no doubt in his mind about his answer, but what would Mrs Evans say to such a vast domestic upheaval ? Waving the letter, he rushed into the kitchen where his wife and daughter were busy with floury hands and flushed cheeks, making cookies and scones for a family feast. " Listen to this ! " he cried, and read out the news.

Mrs Evans dusted her floury hands thoughtfully. " You'll go, James, of course ? " she said.

James Evans laughed. Of course he might have known that she would be willing, and as for Eugenia, the very words " Great North-West " thrilled her.

James Evans sang and whistled in high spirits while he hammered lids on packing-cases and nailed securely the complicated directions and labels. Moving house three thousand miles across Canada was an undertaking one hundred years ago. The family bade their furniture a long farewell when the packed cases were taken away. The new home was at Norway House, the trading post of the Hudson Bay Company, ten miles north of Lake Winnipeg, and the travel route was the chain of lakes and rivers stretching more than half across Canada. The first fifteen hundred miles could be travelled by lake steamers ; the second fifteen hundred over more broken water, by canoe only. Goods packed in portable bales could be taken ; the heavy furniture must be shipped to England, there reshipped to York Factory, Hudson Bay, by a Hudson Bay Company

boat, and from York Factory carried three or four hundred miles to Norway House by trading canoes and many portages over rivers broken by rapids. It was months later, long after the Evans' had arrived at Norway House, that the furniture appeared.

High spirits continued through the long steamer journey by Lakes Ontario, Erie, Huron and Superior and on to Fort William. Then began the really adventurous part. Six to eight Indians manned the high-prowed, birch-bark canoe. Frail and light in weight, the Indian canoe of birch-bark was strong and manageable, running safely over rapids and in broken, rock-strewn water where an ordinary boat would founder. Frail as it was, it could contain a ton in weight and yet was light enough for two men to carry. And if the birch-bark covering the frame of thin cedar hoops did get damaged, the spruce tree growing so freely on the waterside would provide soft supple roots and gum for neat, effective repairs.

At night the canoe drew in to the bank and camp was made. The tent was pitched and a wood fire quickly lighted and supper cooking begun. Meanwhile James Evans went off with his gun in the hope of replenishing the larder for the next day's meals. After sitting for hours in the canoe, Eugenia and her mother loved to move about and explore round the camp. Coming one evening upon some berry-bushes growing near the water, they filled their hands and great leaves with the fruit. Delighted with their find, they picked and picked, when hearing a startled 'woof' they looked up to see a big black bear staring at them from the water's edge. The bear, too, had a liking for berries; spying or scenting the bushes from the other side, he had swum across only to discover that two strange creatures had forestalled him.

Equally terrified, bear and humans stared at each other for a long moment, then the bear backed into the shadows, turned and ran away.

Steadily day after day the canoe breasted the stream, mounting upwards to the distant watershed. When rapids and whirlpools barred progress a portage was made. The travellers walked through the pine-woods where no axe had ever been laid to a tree, following the river course until smooth water was reached. The boatmen carried the goods and canoe, four men to the canoe, four to carry the goods. Many portages had to be made so that weeks had run into months before Lake Winnipeg, the stormiest of inland waters, was reached. Surviving the buffeting and stormy weather, the travellers safely crossed the lake and soon after arrived at their journey's end.

Surveying Norway House and its neighbourhood, guided by Mr Ross the officer in charge of the trading post, James Evans began to realize something of the tremendous job awaiting him. Here the long canoes of the fur trappers met the Hudson Bay Company's boat brigade. Here the trappers parted with their bales of furs, taking in exchange the goods brought by the brigades. Here camped men of many Indian tribes, among them the fierce Blackfeet, the mountain men and, greatest in number and fame, the Crees. James knew the character of these men—wild, savage, superstitious and cruel, yet often, the Crees especially, intelligent and capable of great devotion. He did not know the meaning of the word 'can't.' The difficulties piling ahead thrilled his spirit and stiffened his will. He set about the work energetically, with enthusiasm.

The rest of the summer and through the fall of the year James became a backwoodsman, clearing, with

the help of willing Cree Indians, some ground two miles from the post. Here the beginnings of an Indian village were made. Fields and garden plots were laid out, for these, James considered, were as important as decent dwellings, or even a chapel. It was all very surprising to the Indians. The Christians among them called him Ay-u-me-a-oo-ke-mow, meaning 'praying master'; they worked with a will and listened eagerly to his teaching. The pagans jeered and laughed when he taught that religion and work went hand in hand. Even the Christians found it hard to do 'women's' work such as chopping and carrying firewood and getting water. Hunting, trapping, fishing, canoeing, portageing—these were men's work, but the carrying of the game when it was killed and every task connected with life in the home camp and the wigwam was left to the women. James practised what he so often preached and always carried his own game back from the hunt, and the Indians often watched with amazement their praying master staggering past the Indian village with the carcase of a deer on his shoulders.

Long before the first frosts came, turning the sumach and the maple to flaming red, James had made his winter plans, for, delighted as he was with the success of his preaching and building campaign, his mind turned often to the great north-west plains. Numbers of Cree Indians had flocked to the new village and, renouncing their pagan beliefs, had begged to be taught the Christian way of living. But those tribes in the distant north-west called to James. The trappers of the tribes could be taught when they came to Norway House, but their families lived far away. Leaving the thriving, well-established life of the Christian village to the care of two trained, capable Christian Indians, James began his long journey to the north-west.

The Land of Snow and Ice

Winter had come, land and water were fast in snow and ice, and dog-sledge was the one possible method of travel. The traveller's safety and speed depended on the dogs, and James's team was a beauty. Every one of the four dogs, half wolves as they were, were picked animals, famous for their speed, powers of endurance and ferocity. They accepted their master, James, and their driver; no other soul dared go near them. And how they could run! They became a byword in trapper circles; and for years afterwards if any man was heard to boast of the prowess of his dog-team, some old Indian would be sure to say, "But you ought to have seen Mr Evans's team, and what *they* could do!" With chuckles they would tell of James's care of his dogs, and of how he made them snow-shoes, fastening them to their feet so that the hard or splintering ice should not tear the worn foot-pads.

That first journey to the frozen north deepened James's respect and love for the red men. He found them unerring guides, with an instinctive power for keeping to the track in the face of blizzard gusts that whirled in clouds the light feathery snow, blinding the eyes and covering up the trail as completely as sandstorms cover desert tracks. The men had powers of endurance beyond his comprehension, yet never made him feel a weakling, and hardly though they lived, they were compassionate when he suffered. He was immensely amused at the care with which they put him to bed, winding his fur robe round him, mummy fashion, and tucking him up as tenderly as if he were a baby.

Around the camp-fire, when the short winter day was gone, and dogs and men were fed, James and the team of men held friendly pow-wow. James did most

of the talking, but the red men's grunts were quite expressive to one who lived and travelled with them. James enjoyed nothing so much as his power of breaking the veneer of reserve and indifference that masked their love of fun ; he would have them chuckle in spite of themselves. So the night camps were friendly places ; together they "served the Lord with gladness," and though the laughter died down when James said, "Boys, it's time for prayers," brightness and happiness stayed in the quiet.

So on through the wild, white wastes went the teams, with days and nights illuminated by the strange aurora borealis, glowing in crimson, purple, gold, shot with silver streams of light, and nights enlivened by the wolves whose hunger cries were a signal to the men to pile on more fuel. James found that notwithstanding all the blood-curdling stories he had read of enormous bodies of wolves hunting together, a wolf pack numbered only from five to eight. They fear the glow and heat of fire, and so long as the logs blazed there was little danger of the pack attacking.

James and his guides came at last to Moose Lake, the first of the outlying Hudson Bay Company trading posts. News of their coming had preceded them. They found a warm welcome alike from white and red men. A few days were spent in making friends and in telling the Good News, and then on to other more distant stations 'where the giant Mackenzie River sleeps for half the year.' Word had gone forth from the governor, whose word was law. From York Factory on Hudson Bay he had written, "Show the missionary every courtesy." James found the command translated literally, for in writing his report of that long winter journey he could say, "Received at every post of the Honourable Company with the greatest kindness."

The Alphabet Inventor

Spring was on the way when James encamped on the Mackenzie River : the sleeping giant was awaking, its ice breaking into great floes grinding and groaning one on the other. Tired, thin, with eyes still painful from snow blindness, James set his face southwards, in as great a hurry to return to Norway House as he had been to set out from it. The northern campaign was finished for the season ; when next he saw the trappers it would be at the annual bargain and barter of furs and goods. But before then something waited to be done. It had waited a long time, now it must be finished. Something else was needed to follow up these long preaching and teaching campaigns. The men needed the Book and also the ability to read it, and in their own tongue. James had already studied the tribal languages and had translated parts of the Gospels into the Ojibway tongue. The Cree language was simple, made up of about thirty-six sounds. Surely, he thought, an alphabet might be invented on the sign or symbol system ? He was familiar with the red men's picture-writing, but the new system must allow for the reader to build up signs into words and phrases. It must retain the simplicity of picture-writing and yet allow for its use in Bible translation. Before his call to the north-west he had devised characters or signs to represent the sounds and was on his way to completing a syllabic alphabet. He knew now that the business was of first importance, and arrived at Norway House with his mind full of it.

James emerged from his study one day and invaded the H.B.C. quarters. "Mr Ross ! I've come to beg."

The big handsome man in charge looked up from his ledgers. "Anything the Company has is at your service, Mr Evans. What do you lack, sir ?"

James laughed. "Something I've been wanting a long time. Lead lining from your tea chests is the stuff I want."

"What in the world are you experimenting with now, sir?" Ross asked.

"You come along and see," answered James. "You'll be interested, I know. Mrs Evans is making girdle-cakes, so it's a good time to pay your respects."

The prospect of girdle-cakes was tempting, but Ross was not allowed to sample them until he had viewed James's latest invention. The finished chart of the Cree syllabic alphabet hung on the study wall. Ross surveyed it with interest, and was impressed by its usefulness. "Thirty-six signs, representing the thirty-six sounds; simple to read, to write and understand. It's great, sir. Congratulations!"

"I've tested it," said James. "It's been tried out on a few men in the Indian village yonder. They could read it in about half an hour. What is more, the words built up from the syllables give a better translation of the Bible to the Cree. That's all right, as far as it goes. Now comes the printing."

"Printing! We are a few thousand miles from the nearest printing press," Ross reminded the enthusiast. "It would take an age to get one out from England, and the cost would be enormous."

"Oh yes," James agreed. "That's why I want the lead from the tea chests. Look at these." His fine craftsman's hands handled lovingly little wooden models of the signs on the sheet. "I've cut them all ready for the type. Now I'll make clay casts of them, pour in molten lead—and there's my type, I hope!"

"Lead is valuable, sir, as you know well, but I'll not be tasting Mrs Evans's cakes this day if I say you nay! I'll make it all right with the Company, sir."

And after many attempts the type was ready. Ink

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was made from sturgeon oil and chimney soot, but paper was not to be had. "These books are for the Indians," said James, "then why not try out the 'paper' they use?" Picture writing was often found on the stripped inner lining of birch-bark, so James experimented with it and found that it would take

<u>INITIALS.</u>	<u>SYLLABLES.</u>				<u>FINALS.</u>
a	â	e	oo	ah.	o ow. x Christ.
p	▽	△	▷	▷	P.
t	∨	∧	>	<	T.
k	○	□	○	○	K.
ch	┐	└	┘	└	Ch.
m	┐	└	└	└	M.
n	┐	σ	σ	σ	N.
s	┐	τ	τ	τ	S.
y	┐	ρ	ρ	┐	R. L.

A dot over any syllable lengthens the vowel sound.

Thus. L σ - Manito - The Great Spirit.

LL Mama.
 << Papa.
 <> Papoose.

By permission of the Methodist Missionary Society.

the ink quite well. He borrowed a screw used in the packing of furs from the trading store, and fashioned a printing press. Then, with a store of birch bark paper, his home-made type and ink, he set to the work of book-making.

News of their praying master's invention flew through the Christian Indian village, and the people flocked around James when he appeared with a board

on which he had printed the alphabet, inviting them to learn to read. The simple alphabet was soon mastered and great was their astonishment when the scholars discovered that the sounds of the syllabic signs when put together really made words. "It talks, the board talks!" they cried.

The eager students, elated to find that they could read and understand the meaning of the syllables after half an hour's teaching, soon became teachers of others. Before the books were printed the most advanced pupils made copies on birch-bark, with the aid of a bit of wood for a pen, of the alphabet and the Bible passages which James Evans had translated into Cree. So from wigwam to wigwam, from camp to camp, the story spread of the Great Spirit who is the Father of mankind, and little groups sat listening or eagerly spelling out the story for themselves. It was a thrilling time and James enjoyed it to the full. The only dissatisfied men in the camps were the medicine men and the workers of magic. The new learning threatened their power, so they tried to work on the fears of the men, prophesying all kinds of evil that would fall on those who read the white man's book.

With the coming of the trappers in spring came also the birch-bark books. James had enlisted the Indian squaws as helpers. It was they who stripped the bark from the trees and cut the piles of white 'pages' to the required size. When the sheets were printed the women stitched them into covers of deerskin made pliable and soft by careful, skilled treatment.

The little books have crumbled into dust long ago, though specimens of birch-bark such as Evans used may be seen in the Bible House in London. In their day the books travelled to the most distant hunting-grounds and were literally worn out by much loving, reverent use.

James kept a journal in which he recorded his struggles, defeats and victories. The language is correct, sometimes stilted, customary of the time; one would look for uncontrolled expressions, snappy sentences or even exclamation marks in vain. Calmly he writes of his experiments and ultimate success in creating a written language for the Crees.

28th. "For a fortnight I have been endeavouring to cast type to print the Cree language, but every attempt hitherto has failed. I have no proper materials, neither type metal nor any other thing requisite. I hope, however, to conquer the difficulties . . ."

30th. "I cut type in lead of two characters, and I took moulds in clay, putty, chalk, sand, and tried some further experiments . . ."

13th. "I cast a plate of hardened lead, polished it, and commenced cutting the Cree alphabet."

15th. "Last night I finished the alphabet plate and to-day printed a few sheets. Several boys know all the letters, having written the alphabet for each; and they are much pleased with their new books, but not much more so than I am myself."

The success of the experiment was assured. The news of the attempt to provide the Bible for the Crees in their own tongue reached England, with reports of the clamorous demand for the birch-bark books. It astounded and thrilled both Missionary Society and Hudson Bay Company. Within a few months an up-to-date printing press, paper, and type were on their way to Norway House, so that quickly, with less labour and in a more lasting form, books in the Cree syllabic characters might be printed and put into the eager hands outstretched for them.

Son and Brother

Now that he had taught other hands to set the type and use the press, James Evans heard again the Red Indian trappers calling. He loved the busy life at Norway House, the thriving Indian village, the preaching and teaching in the Christian chapel, the friendship and fellowship of the Indian workers. It was hard to leave it all, harder still to say good-bye to Mrs Evans and Eugenia, and the peace and comfort of his home. That summer the far-off trading posts of the west called him : the region of Peace River, the Athabasca river and lake, which, having their sources in the great ridge of the Rocky Mountains, lose themselves one into the other, making fertile the vast plains through which they flow.

It was a summer journey, and therefore by water ; but the long birch-bark canoes were wasteful of men, they needed six at least. James's idea was to go with two, but no canoe of the right size was available. He set about making one. He greatly admired the workmanship of the birch-bark canoe but did not attempt to copy the Indian model. He wanted a material light and strong, portable and easily repaired. He experimented with sheets of tin and made a most successful little craft in which he travelled thousands of miles. There was tremendous excitement when it was launched, for the bright tin reflected the sun's rays like a mirror. "See, it is an island of light !" said the Red Indians, and so the boat was named.

James chose two canoe-men to bear him company, Hassel and Oig. Hassel belonged to the Chippewayan tribe who lived on the banks of the Athabasca River. He was delighted to go ; his family were still pagan, very superstitious, and bound by tribal custom ; he longed for them to hear the Good News. Oig had journeyed frequently with James, and was a good

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campaigner and traveller. With such good men James expected to push on at great speed. They made splendid progress for some days, and the flashing *Island of Light* proved to be all James had hoped. One morning, hoping to journey a considerable way before the day grew hot, they broke camp very early. The morning mist hung over the water, the outlines of the river banks were hazy. Hassel was in the bow, James Evans in the centre, Oig was at the stern. Presently Hassel called softly, "I see ducks. Hand me the gun." James peered into the mist. Oig reached behind him, lifted the gun and pulled back the hammer in readiness. Reaching forward he handed it to James who took it, still looking for the ducks to rise. As his hand closed on the gun, somehow it went off and Hassel fell, shot dead.

Stunned at first with shock and horror, presently James and Oig wept and mourned for their friend. They buried him on the river bank and turned the boat homeward. They were far from Hassel's own tribe, the nearest people were their own friends at Norway House.

It was a terrible homecoming and although the Indians, usually fiercely strong in demanding vengeance on any wrong done to their race, showed James their belief and trust in him, his gaiety of spirit and sparkling vivacity went from him. "Our beloved praying master has grown old," said the Indians. "His sorrow has taken the boy from the man!"

James and Mrs Evans faced the trouble together. There was only one thing for him to do, they felt; he must surrender himself to Hassel's family. Accidental though the death was, it was his hand that had held the gun. He must take the responsibility for Hassel's death upon his own shoulders. The pagan

law held good in the Chippewayan tribe, 'a life for a life' and Hassel's family would abide by that law, they knew. James settled up his affairs, made arrangements for the work to be carried on by Christian Indians, bade his wife and daughter farewell, and went alone on his long, sad journey to the Chippewayan Indians.

The tribe gathered round him as he beached the *Island of Light*, eager to discover why he had come. Asking for the wigwam of the Hassel family, he at once went in and sat down in the attitude of a mourner. The family looked on, wondering and amazed to see a white man weeping, as they said, "like a woman." When at last he told how their son and brother had died there was a moment of intense silence, and then with a shout the men demanded vengeance. Threatening faces were thrust into his, tomahawks were brandished, knives were drawn, and loud cries claiming the first right to draw blood crashed about his ears. James sat with bowed head and covered face, waiting for the end.

Then suddenly, just as one man sprang with upraised knife, the old mother stopped her bewailing and moaning over the fate of her son and hobbled over to James Evans. Putting her hands on his head she called out, "The white man shall not die. There was no evil in his heart. He *loved* my son. He shall live and shall be my son in the place of the one who is dead."

The old mother had her way in spite of all the angry threats and James was adopted into the tribe and family. He sorrowed with them for Hassel all through the appointed days of mourning. Living in the Indian fashion with his new father and mother, his sorrow found relief in behaving to them like a son. And they listened while he told of the God Whom their son had

loved and served, and was serving still with joy and gladness. So in peace he lived among them until the time of mourning was past and in peace they let him go back to his home and his work. And as long as he lived he sent his adopted parents a share of his salary as their own son had done.

Conflict and Trial

On his journeys hints had been dropped to James of the peremptory orders issued from York Factory by more than one of the H.B.C. officers at the trading posts. James found them disturbing. He had always been on good terms with the officers, receiving unstinted, kindly hospitality at every post which he visited. In the early days of James Evans's work among the north-west trappers the governor at York Factory had bade his men to 'keep on good terms with those gentlemen of the Wesleyan Society.' But for some time it had been clear that the governor and James Evans did not think alike on some matters connected with the running of the boat brigades, and now the latest order from York Factory conflicted directly with James Evans's teaching. "Utmost speed by the brigades is essential," wrote the governor. "The men must strain every effort to arrive at York Factory with the furs as early as possible. They must try to save a day, two days, even a week on their usual time in order that the Company's ship may sail with its load in good time to England."

"Praying Master, what must we do?" The little company of Indians, gathered together for worship and counsel, brought their problem to James one evening. "The governor's order bids us not to tarry for anything, but if we work seven days a week we break God's law. Praying Master, why did the great God bid His children keep one day in seven for Him?

Are they not all His days, seeing that He made the world, day and night, winter and summer?"

Patiently James spoke of the wisdom that devised a day of rest for the body, leisure for the mind, freedom for the spirit to worship God in fellowship with others. He told how necessary rest and change were for health and growth, that men, animals, even the ground from which they reaped their crops were made richer and stronger through the keeping of the law of rest.

James knew that he must tackle the problem from the other end also. Plainly he put the case for a Sabbath rest to the governor. He received a flat denial of the necessity and an intimation to keep from interfering in the governor's affairs. Wrathfully the governor wrote to others that the "agitation for Sabbath observance by the fur brigades increased the vice of idleness." He maintained that the brevity of the transport season could have no regard for Sabbath observance. The night, he said, was for rest, the day for work.

James Evans's fighting blood was up. The governor's zeal for the Company's welfare he knew and respected, but this order denied the value of the Sabbath and the God Who had given the Sabbath to man. He made one more attempt to win over the governor to his way of thinking. Somewhat bluntly stating that he should continue to preach the truth as he saw it, James went on to beg the governor to give Sabbath keeping a trial. "The men who rest on Sunday," he wrote, "you will find will travel better and quicker than those who work seven days in the week."

The governor ignored the letter and gave more stringent and direct orders to the officers to pass on to the trappers and boat brigades. But James held firm and so did his little band of Christian brigade men. When the time came for the brigade to start

from York Factory to Norway House the boat of Christian Indians were determined to rest on the Sabbath day. On the first Sabbath of the journey, while the rest of the boat brigade went on with jeers and laughter at the stupidity of the Christians, the little company rested. They changed into clean clothes, cooked a good meal, held a little service together and rested in comfort. The next morning, waking bright and early, they continued their journey. It took them two whole days to catch up with the others, but already the good rest had fitted them for the struggle. By the next Sabbath they were a day ahead, and after the second week the Sabbath keepers kept the lead, though always resting on the Sabbath day. Increasing their gain day by day, they arrived at Norway House half a week before the rest, to the astonishment of the waiting trappers. Their goods exchanged for the trappers' furs, the Sabbath keepers turned their boat and started on the return trail, meeting on the second day the first of the tired, toiling brigades they had out-distanced. They arrived at York Factory more than a week before the others, their Sabbath-keeping triumphantly vindicated.

James rejoiced openly and perhaps unwisely in the victory; the governor saw in it a challenge to his authority. He armed himself to the fight. Rumours began to circulate about James Evans, for he had other enemies; hints were dropped concerning his character. These were reported to the governor, and witnesses were discovered to prove their truth. Whether these accusations originated in an angry, embittered mind, whether the governor believed the reports, will never be known. He called James Evans up for trial; prepared and instructed, witnesses perjured themselves; and James was found guilty of the charges. The Governor wrote to the London office

demanding James Evans's recall from work among the Indians ; he was an honoured servant of the Company, zealous, ardent, conscientious ; there was no doubt at the London office of the truth of the accusations. The Missionary Society was informed, and six months later James opened a letter calling him to put his work into reliable hands and journey to England to answer the charges made against him.

James was utterly dumbfounded. Youth, strength, a craftsman's art, inventive genius, loyalty, and the joy of doing, he had given them all : for what ? Sternly he refused to dwell on the evil which men had done to him, and set about obeying this last bitter order from the Missionary Society. When the long, unhappy journey was accomplished, James stood before those who had already judged him in their hearts and demanded a full investigation of the reports and charges.

At last after months of waiting and anxiety James was triumphantly cleared. Worn out with the strain as he was, something of boyish satisfaction crept again into his voice. He had been forbidden to preach until his character was cleared, but now he could do what he had longed all through the months of waiting to do—he could tell the story of the red men calling, in the hope that others might hear the distant cry.

So night after night in small country chapels and in large galleried city churches James Evans told the story of the search for the Book and for the white man to interpret it. Crowds came to hear, and to wonder. They were good, though strenuous days and nights. James was himself again ; the clouds had lifted, and clearer than ever before he could hear God's voice calling. There was still so much to do ! "We shall soon be going back," he said cheerfully one night.

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Mrs Evans shook her head. "It is pleasant to think of," she said, "but I have had a strange presentiment all day that we shall never see Norway House again."

James smiled at her forlorn tone. The boyish look flashed over his worn face as he said, "Well, heaven is just as near from England as from Norway House!"

Half an hour later James had made that short journey; he had followed his last trail. But others, hearing red men calling, would rise up and answer, and so in the years that followed James's death the Book telling of God's love for men was carried by canoe and dog sleigh over far-flung, distant trails

Sources : *The Apostle of the North : James Evans*, by Egerton R. Young ; *By Canoe and Dog-train*, by Egerton R. Young ; *One Hundred Years of Canadian Missions*, Vol. I by Mrs F. C. Stephenson ; also grateful acknowledgment to E. E. Whimster, author of *James Evans, a Pioneer to the Red Indians* (Methodist Missionary Society).

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